



A

S E R M O N,

Preached in the CHAPEL at LAMBETH,

At the CONSECRATION of

The Honourable and Right Reverend Father in God

B R O W N L O W,

Lord Bishop of LITCHFIELD and COVENTRY.



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1716
*St. Paul's Character considered, and his Example recommended to his
Successors in the Church.*

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 ACTS XX. 24.

BUT NONE OF THESE THINGS MOVE ME; NEITHER COUNT I MY LIFE DEAR UNTO MYSELF, SO THAT I MIGHT FINISH MY COURSE WITH JOY, AND THE MINISTRY WHICH I HAVE RECEIVED OF THE LORD JESUS, TO TESTIFY THE GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF GOD.

WE read in the verses immediately preceding the text, that St. Paul, being on his journey to Jerusalem, from Miletus sent to Ephesus, and called the Elders of the Church together to give them his special directions for their behaviour in the care of it: and, in order more particularly to gain their attention, he recapitulates his own conduct, of which they had been in part witnesses, representing the dangers which he had hitherto surmounted, as well as those which he knew by the Holy Spirit were still awaiting him, and concludes with that noble determination to submit to them, which I have selected for the subject of our present meditations. [a] *But none of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I*

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[a] Acts xx. 24.

might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the Grace of God.

To do justice to the Zeal of this Champion for our Religion, I shall attempt very briefly, in my ensuing discourse, to consider him in the respective stations of a Christian, an Apostle, and a Martyr for his faith ; and with the most humble diffidence of my own opinion, and respect for the judgment of this audience, beg leave to recommend him in each of these characters, as a shining example to his Successors in the Church.

In delineating the lives of great men, we are too often put to difficulties to find out their real dispositions, either through the envy of those who have been witnesses to their actions, or the misrepresentations of those who have related them : but on this occasion we have the most authentick history of our Apostle's miraculous Conversion, and indefatigable labours in the ministry, from the pen of an inspired writer, confirmed by his own records. And that he died in defence of those doctrines which he had propagated with a constancy almost unparalleled, the uncontroverted history of the first ages of Christianity abundantly assures us.

If we consider St. Paul under the common appellation of a Christian only, what encounter can be more truly honourable than that in which the Gospel requires us to contend ? For truth against error ; for virtue against vice ; for rational piety against superstition. This is that war in which every Christian is listed
at

at his baptism; this the cause which our Saviour calls us to engage in, and, if it be the will of God, even to die for: and I need not say how admirable a cause it is, how becoming a wife and good man to support, and to persevere in with all steadfastness.

If we look to the precepts of our faith, what clear and sublime truths may we behold in them, which no other religion ever contained; nor could any besides God have taught to mankind: and by these our understandings are improved to an height beyond what any system of Philosophy ever did or could have raised them to.

Nor are the practical parts of our duty less calculated to improve our piety, than its revelations to illuminate our understandings. Here we may find virtue set forth in its utmost perfection; such restraints laid upon our passions, as had never been thought of before; such advances made in every part of our behaviour, as became that religion, which the son of God was himself pleased to preach to the world. And, to engage us the more to embrace these truths and pursue this piety, we have such precious promises of a supernatural assistance to co-operate with our endeavours here, and of an eternal reward to crown us hereafter, as may suffice to encourage us not only to espouse this cause, but to go on triumphantly against all opposition in the defence of it.

This was that conflict to which St. Paul so frequently alludes in his writings: and with what courage and resolution he behaved

haved himself in it, the account which the Holy Scriptures give both of his actions and sufferings sufficiently informs us.

But we must not stop in these general considerations : St. Paul was not only a Christian, but an Apostle ; an *Apostle*, [b] *not of man, neither by man, but of God*, by the special mission and miraculous call of *Jesus Christ*.

How excellent this office in itself was, we cannot doubt, if what I before said concerning our religion be true. For if that be the best and most divine institution which was ever delivered to mankind, then certainly it must needs have been a most honourable office to be employed by God as his immediate Minister in the publishing of it; to have been taught this religion by the Son of God; and to have been endued with extraordinary gifts and powers of the Holy Spirit for the better instruction of others in it. And what noble help did it please God to bestow upon his Apostles for the fulfilling of this great trust ! a clear illumination and a compleat knowledge of all the mysteries of the Gospel ; such an infallibility of doctrine as not only secured them from all actual error, but from all possibility of mistake in what they were to preach ; such a firmness of mind ; such a divine wisdom and prudence in their conduct, as their enemies knew not how either to withstand, or gainsay ; to which may be added, such a supernatural power to work miracles as put their authority beyond all doubt !

[b] Gal. i. 1.

This was their office; and these their credentials, in the discharge of it: and how successfully our Apostle fulfilled this part of his character I shall not need to say. They all engaged with vigour, but he laboured in it more abundantly. He preached to the greater part of the then known countries of the world; from Jerusalem to Illyricum, to Rome, nay and even beyond Rome to Spain, and some authors affirm to [c] Britain itself. He went on triumphantly, and where-ever he came he conquered, and by the force of his reasoning, and conviction of his arguments, compelled the religion, or rather, the idolatry of the Gentiles, to give way to the Gospel of Christ.

How much he ventured, and how greatly he suffered in the discharge of his duty, both as a Christian and as an Apostle, the last circumstance under which I proposed to consider this holy Man, that of a Martyr to Christ, brings me to observe. And indeed the very state of the world in those days may sufficiently speak it to us, when both Jews and Gentiles conspired to oppose the doctrines which he preached, and to persecute those who were employed in the publication of them. But yet supposing our religion to be not only true but of divine original, even this must be accounted an honourable employment for a good man to be engaged in. To suffer for the truth, is of itself one of the most noble trials that any one can be exposed to; but when the religion which a man suffers for is not only true, but of divine authority; when the Minister is immediately both instructed by God, and commissioned to declare what he has revealed to him; to suffer upon such an account, is so far from being a reproach,

[c] Stillingfleet's Orig. Britannicæ.

that in our Apostle's own language [*d*] *it is the gift of God*: such a peculiar mark of his favour, as whilst it the more conforms us to the example of Christ, must also render us more acceptable to him; and more respectable in the esteem of all good men. And in this part of St. Paul's character his behaviour was truly glorious. His life was an ornament to his profession, and his profession cast a lustre upon his life. He feared no dangers, he declined no hazards in the discharge of his ministry. It is indeed an astonishing account which himself gives of his own sufferings in this warfare, when he recounts what [*e*] *labours* he underwent, what *stripes* he had born, what *prisons* he had been confined in, and I had almost said how many deaths he had sustained: for even in this sense the expression of "his *dying daily*" [*f*] may be understood almost without a metaphor.

These were some of this Holy Man's encounters: through these dangers he went on in his vocation both as a Christian and as an Apostle, [*g*] *troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed: always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in his body.* And in the place now before us, while he was giving his charge to the Elders of the church of Ephesus, he expresses to them his fixed resolution of going to Jerusalem, without the least apprehension of what might befall him there; save only, to use his own expressions, that [*h*] *the Holy Ghost witnessed in every city that bonds and afflictions abided him; but none, says he, of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself so that I might finish*

[*d*] Ephes. ii. 8.[*e*] 2 Cor. xi. 23.[*f*] 1 Cor. xv. 31.[*g*] 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9, 10.[*h*] Acts xx. 23, 24.

my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the Grace of God. And the event of his history sufficiently shews, how firmly he adhered to this resolution. For if we consider him as a Christian only, who ever more constantly testified the Gospel, or lived more conformably to the rules of it than he? who ever better understood, was more zealous in the maintaining of it, or more evidently shewed the power of religion, where it is sincerely embraced, to [i] *cleanse the believer from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God?* So careful was he to act suitably to his profession in the first and lowest capacity of a disciple of Christ.

If we regard him as an Apostle, he not only testified this Gospel of the Grace of God himself, but delivered it to others in the same purity in which he had received it: Nor would he endure that any one should teach or do any thing, which might in the least tend to the corruption of it.

If we look into the many Epistles which he wrote to the Churches of Christ, to instruct some; to reprove others; to direct all; with what care doth he every where set forth the pure doctrine of the Gospel, and guard it against all mistakes which either ignorant or prejudiced persons might be likely to run into concerning it? And as for his assiduity in that great office to which he was called; his labours, his diligence, his sufferings speak it to us. He went on without intermission in the discharge of his ministry, and was not by any dangers to be discouraged from pursuing the work of it.

[i] 2 Cor. vii. 1.

Thus he every way both testified the Gospel of the Grace of God himself and taught others to do likewise. And when it pleased God, as it often did please him, to call him to *witness a good confession* before Kings and Rulers, the Judges and Magistrates of the Earth; he neither waved in nor shrunk from it; he acknowledged his faith readily, he pleaded for it, he almost persuaded his very adversaries to be of the same opinion with himself concerning it. Neither the malice of the Jews nor the madness of the Gentiles could stagger his constancy; he despised their threatnings, their prisons, their persecutions; and defended his religion in defiance of them all, both in Jerusalem and at Rome, before the Jewish Council and the Roman Prefects; nay in the court of the Emperor himself, and to his very face, he gloried in his commission, and at last sealed it with his blood.

Let the spirit then of this great man dwell in us; let us consider ourselves to be set, as he was, for the testimony of the Gospel of the Grace of God, and whatever our calling or profession be, whatever talents we have received, or opportunities we enjoy, let us be careful to do the utmost we can to promote his glory, and the advancement of his religion in the world. In the words of our Apostle, [k] *having gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophecy, according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation.*

[k] Rom. xii. 6, 7, 8.

Let

Let those amongst us who are initiated into the subordinate offices of the Church, consider the injunction laid upon them to give attendance to *reading*, to *instruction*, to *doctrine*; and let such as are advanced to be successors to the Apostles, and are appointed to be rulers over it, remember the advice of St. Paul to Timothy, who was consecrated to the same sacred employment, to [l] *reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering*, and to [m] *stir up the Grace of God which is in them by the imposition of hands*.

If it be objected, that the same illumination is not now to be expected by them which was bestowed on the Apostles at the first propagation of our faith; let me add too, that if their assistances are less, their difficulties are diminished in the same proportion. It was a principal commendation of St. Paul, that he persevered in preaching the Gospel even in the Imperial City, although the powers of government were combined against him: it is the peculiar felicity of our times, that we are hurt by no persecutions; that Christianity is the established religion of our country; and that it is not only guarded by our civil constitution, but protected by our most excellent Monarch, who is by inclination as well as title a Defender of its Faith.

As the religion which St. Paul established was to put an end to the Jewish æconomy, the Chief Priests, the Scribes, and Pharisees, and the Doctors of the Law who subsisted by it, were sure to oppose him where-ever he appeared: the restless inheritors of their dispositions have from time to time tried every art, which

[l] 2 Tim. iv. 2.

[m] 2 Tim. i. 6.

infidelity

infidelity could supply, or raillery suggest, to engage us in the same competition; and the event has sufficiently shewn, that our cause has gained strength from every contest; nor have we occasion to be afraid of any future adversary, whilst our church continues, as at present, under the influence of guardians, who are equally enabled by their abilities to defend, and by their examples to support it in the world: and if I may be allowed to augurate from long experience, the addition which is this day made to their number, will add weight to it in each of these particulars.

It was our Apostle's task, not only to root out the Gentile superstitions, but to introduce a new doctrine, hard to be received, and at that time difficult to be comprehended: It may perhaps be the lot of his successors to combat the prejudices of vicious men; but I believe the tenets of our religion were never better understood, or had, I fear, less influence on our practice than in these days.

It fell to St. Paul's share, besides his contentions with false Brethren, to engage with untutored Christians who did not sufficiently understand the mysteries of their faith; and in a point of no small consequence to differ in opinion even with [n] St. Peter himself: in this the complexion of our times appears to bear some affinity to those of the Apostle; our opponents may arise out of our own household, and we may be called upon to defend the propriety of that test, which our Church has so long required of her Ministers, as the terms of their admission into her service.

[n] Gal. ii. 11.

But

But whatever is the fashion of the age we live in; whether a love of disputation, a thirst after novelty, or the palliating a wicked life by undermining the foundations of all religion, shall be its prevailing principle, let us endeavour by sound learning and an orthodox faith to silence the cavils of unreasonable men: and as we read, that in building the walls of Jerusalem [o] *every man with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon*; so let it be our care, whilst we are peaceably prosecuting the duties of our functions, not to neglect to fortify ourselves with such armour, as will enable us to stand in the day of trial.

Let then the world take its course; let it think and speak of us as it pleaseth; it is the natural result of it's own corruption, for [p] *out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*: but if our lives are as innocent as our profession is excellent, we may trust to the native goodness of our cause, nor fear the attacks either of open enemies or disgusted friends; but, having the example of St. Paul to direct us in every station, may join with one heart in the words of our Liturgy, in beseeching Almighty God, that his [q] Church being always preserved from false Apostles may be ordered and guided by faithful and true pastors, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

[o] Nehemiah iv. 17.

[p] Matt. xii. 34.

[q] Coll. for St. Matthias.

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